

PHILADELPHIA: DECEMBER, 1852.

HEROIC WOMEN OF THE OLDEN DAY.

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CHARLOTTE DE LA TREMOUILLE,
COUNTESS OF DERBY.

The Countess of Derby may well be pronounced one of the noblest, greatest, and most heroic women that England or the world ever has produced. I write England advisedly, for, although she was a Frenchwoman by birth, and that of the very highest rank short of royalty—being a daughter of the princely house of La Tremouille, it was still in England that all her great exploits were performed—all her extraordinary qualities displayed: and as she was married in very early youth to the gallant and noble Derby, nearly, indeed, at the same period when his royal master, Charles I., espoused the beautiful daughter of the last hero-king of France, Henry, the Bearnois of Navarre, it is not unnatural to conclude, that it was in her adopted, rather than her native country, that she learned those lessons of strong persistency, cool endurance, and patient fortitude, which would appear in all ages to have been characteristic rather of the English than of the French temper, which is generally held to be conspicuous for impulsive gallantry and offensive valor, rather than for perseverance under the pressure of evil or iron sufferance of inevitable calamity.

Still, heroism is of no age or country—although there may be peculiar shades or hues which appear to belong to the attributes, and to constitute, as it were, almost general traits of national character. Even in this view, however, there are discrepancies to be noted by the wise observer, which quickly show the injudiciousness of those who, from general traits, would seek to establish absolute principles, or to constitute individual actions the basis of invariable laws.

Thus, in spite of the generally prevailing notion that the French, however admirable at attack, are greatly inferior in the defence of fortified places, the most wonderful instance of endurance, under horrors of famine, pestilence, and exhaustion almost unparalleled, recorded in modern history, is the protracted resistance of Massena within the walls of Genoa, against the combined armies of Austria and fleets of England, by which, in point of fact, he neutralized all the successes of the victors, and converted defeat into triumph, by holding out until the French columns had already crossed the Alps, and thus making possible the almost miraculous campaign of Marengo.

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Again, it was Charlotte de la Tremouille, who, with unparalleled feminine heroism, defended Latham House long after hope had been extinct in the hearts of the bravest of its masculine defenders, while her Lord was fighting afar off for his church and his king—who, a second time, after the noble head of Derby had fallen on the gory scaffold, last token of his adherence to that holy cause which he could uphold no longer, defended the Peel Castle in her hereditary realm of Man, fighting for the rights of her son, and the hereditary dignities of his race, long after the weak unworthy monarch, Charles II., had departed a fugitive from his kingdom—and who so earned the noble praise of being the last person in all the territories, provinces, dependencies, of Great Britain, who laid down arms which she had taken up for the rights, and which she resigned only—she the sovereign of a mere mimic realm almost within gunshot of the shores of England—after Virginia, the Bermudas, Antigua and Barbadoes had submitted to the Parliament; after the sister islands of the Channel, Scilly and Guernsey had surrendered, and the narrow seas were swept far and nigh, cutting off all supplies, and prohibiting all egress or ingress to her island fortalice, by the unrivalled fleets of Blake.

Equally heroic with that heroine of all time, the Maid of Arc, her heroism was yet of a character entirely different and distinct. The character of the latter was essentially French—French of all ages—though modified assuredly by the peculiar influences of her own era—deeply imbued with romance—full of impulsive fire, burning with generous ardor, deeply imbued with the sensibility to the call of glory, kindled at a word to the wildest enthusiasm, not unresponsive to the breath of superstitious fatalism, yet despondent when held inactive, and recovering her high courage and unflinching heroism only when actually called upon to do or to suffer.

Widely different was the noble Charlotte de la Tremouille—for of her it might have been said, as it is said of the greatest man of the present day, that duty was everything and glory nothing, except indorsed as it arose incidentally from the consequence of duty done. Not in the slightest degree touched by romance as to her own secret nature, although the history of her career is, in it-

self, the wildest of romances—scarcely, if at all, influenced by impulses—a person of slender imagination and few sensibilities—superior to all superstitions—superior also to all reverses of fortune, she was greater by far in suffering than in acting—and it was rather by supporting with unmoved constancy what her enemy did unto her, than by doing unto them what they might not have half so hardly supported, that she earned her undying fame and spotless reputation.

It is said, that in her younger days she was remarkable for delicate and extraordinary beauty; if it were so, anxiety and a life harder and exposed to vicissitudes more man-like than are wont to break the calm tenor of female ways, early destroyed all its vestiges; for in the magnificent painting of Vandyke, which still exists, as do those of most others of the celebrated ladies of her day, she is represented as a stout and somewhat coarse-featured matron, of middle age, richly attired, but possessing none of that refined and gentle haughtiness—if I may so express myself—which we somehow or other expect to see in the carriage and lineaments of those who, themselves great, have mingled much in the society of the great, and yet more who have themselves been the doers of great actions.

There is none of this haughtiness, or dignity, then, call it which you will, in the air or features of Charlotte de la Tremouille; nor is there any marked impress on her brow and lip either of deep thought and high intellect, or of brilliancy, daring and courage almost superhuman. On the contrary, she has the air of a genuine country matron of high class, in her own age; something, one would think, of a lady Bountiful; apt at distilling simples and dispensing medicines to the ailing, good things to the hungry of her tenantry and neighbors—yet this was she, who for two successive kings of England did more, held more, suffered more and lost more, than any other woman who ever drew the breath of life—who, after the death of one monarch on the scaffold, and the despairing exile of another, for whom her noble lord had died devoted, endured the utmost of persecution from the cruel and victorious Parliament—who, after the restoration of that monarch's worthless son, endured yet more from his base ingratitude than she had done from the rancor of his enemies, herself coming nigh to perishing on the same scaffold which had drunk her husband's gore, charged by the perjured monster Oates, with participation in that Papish plot, which never had an existence without the brain of that most mean and odious of all murderers.

Early in the war of the Commonwealth and the King, that war through the furnace and fierce ordeal of which, through so much misery to the kings, the nobles, and the people of England, was wrought out at last the wonderful edifice of her present constitution, with all its inestimable blessings—that constitution, which alone possessing the power of self-modification, can be progressive without being iconoclastic or destructive, can undergo change without fear of revolution, and therefore bids fair to be coeval with the chalk cliffs which wall its empire. Early in that war, or rather, I should say, at its very commencement, the Earl of Derby had taken arms

for his sovereign, believing it wiser to trust to the king, whose prerogatives were already strictly limited, whose leaning toward absolutism might be supposed to be, in a great measure, checked, and to whose encroachments all constitutional means of resistance existed, in full force, or rather reinforced and greatly strengthened by the passage of the bill of rights, and the adoption of the general remonstrance—than to submit to the self-constituted authority of the Parliament, now evidently bent on wresting everything beyond the bare name of regal power from the almost helpless monarch, whose proceedings had no limit save their own consciences and their own will; and whose violence and outrage, the kingly power once gone, and the ministers of the law merely their own creatures, there was no means in the kingdom constituted for disputing legally or resisting forcibly.

Steadfastly, gallantly, he had fought to the last—nor less nobly had his Countess contended, as all men know—for the defence of Latham House is history—and there are few to whom its details are not facts, as it were, of every day allusion. How she held out alone, with her lord afar, not fighting unwomanly with the sword, not donning the attire or buckling on the armor of a man—for heroine as she was, she saw the indelicacy and intility alike of such procedure—but aiding, assisting, comforting, inspiring all, by the unmoved composure of her noble face, by the unvarying and placid smile with which she received all evil tidings; with which she endured all personal inconveniences and sufferings—including toward the end the want of common necessities, of bread and water to support human life. Limiting her own table to the quantity and quality allotted to the meanest sentinel; braving the hottest fire of the assailants to carry refreshments to the weary, assistance to the wounded, of the combatants; nay! as defender after defender, fell slain outright or sorely wounded at his appointed station, carrying arms and ammunition, clad in her full magnificence of court attire, to any member, as they failed him, of that weak, yet invincible garrison; and in that last assault, when the ladders were reared against every bartizan and buttress, when the volleying death-shots raked every embrasure and window, when the clash and clang of broadsword on cuirass and helmet were mingled with the roar of the culverins, the sharp rattle of the musketry, and savage shouts and execrations of her combatants, standing with her maidens side by side with their defenders, and loading musketoon and harquebuss as fast as they might fire them, until all was ended.

Vainly, however, fought the Earl in the field, vainly the Countess in her guarded fortalice—for the good cause might not prevail, until England should have supped deeper yet on horrors, and her king should have bowed down that "gray disrowned head," erewhile so fair and noble, to the base felon's block. If Charles lost kingdom, crown, and life, Derby and his young wife lost all they had in England, princely estates, high rank, wealth almost royal, title most exalted—all was gone save the feudal royalty of the little Isle of Man; save the lives which both had risked so freely, one scarce had thought they valued them.

And even these they held, not as their own possessions, but as things to be devoted to the cause, to be cast self-sacrificed to the winds of Heaven, so soon as the service of the king should desire it.

So for the time all was over. Hopton, the king's best leader in the west, was defeated, and his army utterly dispersed at Torrington by Fairfax. Montrose was *hors du combat* deprived of all his men by the decisive route of Philipbaugh—and Astley—gallant Astley—who, before the first encounter of the Cavaliers and Roundheads at Edgehill, knelt at the head of his lines, and prayed this short prayer memorable through all time: "O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me!" and then springing to his charger cried, "March on, boys!" and led a charge so fiery and so well sustained, that it won the day. That same Lord Astley, defeated at Stowe by Morgan, with superior forces, and himself made prisoner, said to the Parliamentarians, "You have done your work, and may now go to play, unless you choose to fall out among yourselves!"

And in truth their work was done—and their cruel play was about to commence, which had for stakes the fortunes of a country, and the life of a king.

In the short insurrection which broke out, when the tidings were proclaimed how that the Parliament had determined to try the king by a high court of justice, and to bring him, whom they dared not murder, to the block, Derby bore no part. Ill-planned, uncombined, irregular, it had neither concert, nor the chances of success—it could be fatal only to its projectors, and fatal to them it was—for after it was shed on the scaffold the first blood that flowed during the war, save by the sword, *flagrante bello*, when sword was met by sword—the blood of Lisle and Lucas and Lord Capel shamefully slaughtered—Cromwell's first deed of cruelty and shame—in spite of capitulation after Colchester.

So far from that insurrection deferring, or tending to prevent, it accelerated only the murder of the king, by harassing the apprehensions, without alarming the fears of the Parliamentarians. But, as I have said, in it Derby bore no part, it was too suddenly concerted to permit him to be present, even if his military sagacity and clear political foresight would have permitted him to join so rash a rising.

But he was in no condition to have done so in any event, for so soon as he saw that for the present all was lost, he made good his retreat, rather than his escape, with his Countess, her son, and the trustiest of his adherents, to the strong walls and castles of his island kingdom, which he put in order at once to make the most vigorous defence of his own rights, and to wage war for his own crown of Man, and for that of his brother, king of England.*

Treton, meanwhile, who commanded in the north for the Parliament, and had a strong force

*It must be borne in mind that this was not a mere ceremonial or nominal title; but that this Countess of Derby was received by Charles II. as *notre très chère et très puissante sœur, Reine de Man et Comtesse de Derby*—and that it is only within the memory of persons now alive, that the feudal title of kings of Man was extinguished by its cession to the crown of England, by the then Earl of Derby.

afoot in Lancashire, sent him a trumpet, with a summons to surrender on good conditions, to whom the Earl returned this answer of high and stern defiance:

"I received your letter with indignation, and with scorn return you this answer, that I cannot but wonder whence you gather any hopes that I should prove, like you, treacherous to my sovereign; since you cannot be ignorant of my former actions in his late majesty's service, from which principles of loyalty I am no whit departed. I scorn your proffers: I disdain your favor; I abhor your treason; and am so far from delivering up this island to your advantage, that I shall keep it to the utmost of my power for your destruction. Take this for your final answer, and forbear any further solicitations; for if you trouble me with any more messages of this nature, I will burn the paper, and hang up the messenger. This is the immutable resolution, and shall be the undoubted practice of him who accounts it his chiefest glory to be his majesty's most loyal and obedient subject."

"DERBY."

Scarce had these stirring and memorable lines flowed from the pen of the brave and noble cavalier, before he was again called to prove in the field that indomitable loyalty, for which his race was so nobly conspicuous.

The Second Charles, proclaimed by his Scottish subjects, who had revolted against the grim intolerance and fanaticism of the Independents, had remained well nigh two years in their camp, rather indeed as a prisoner than a king, but had still in spite of the fatal defeat at Dunbar maintained his position as monarch, and kept up his own hopes and those of his well-wishers, of one day recovering his English crown. And now, at length, had the day arrived. Profiting by a false movement of Cromwell, who, being pressed for supplies, was compelled to leave the way into England open to the Scots, he rushed down, high of hope, into the centre of his native realm, trusting to rally on himself all the stout cavaliers of the northern and the midland counties, and by a daring stroke to master the metropolis before Oliver could retrace his steps, or come up with his rear.

But little knew he of the giant with whom he had to do.

Rapidly he marched southward, but tardily and feebly came in the levies of the cavaliers. Defeat and death had thinned their numbers, had tamed their high, hot blood, had rendered them, although brave as ever, hopeless and averse to further struggles. Sequestrations and confiscations had narrowed their resources, their plate, their silver candlesticks, and posset dishes had been melted down in the late king's service; their trusty war horses were dead or aged; their gallant sons were dead on the field or on the scaffold; their brave tenants were decimated, and the survivors given to other masters. Never have men so fought, so bled, so suffered for any cause or king, as have the cavaliers of England for that most lamentable and disastrous house of Stuart—never have men met with such ingratitude.

Levies and men came in slowly—but at the first trumpet call, the foot of Derby was in the stirrup, the blue scarf of the king upon his breast, the

king's black feather in his hat—he left his castle to the keeping of his noble wife, and as he kissed her proud fair brow at parting, “It may be,” he said, “that we shall meet no more on earth, but we shall meet in Heaven! Mourn not for me, therefore, Charlotte, if I fall, but be strong and brave in duty.”

And she replied, “Do but your duty, and I will not mourn, save in the secret heart; and when you are saint in Heaven, look you down on us, and see if I do not mine.”

His race was soon run, and his days numbered. His small detachment cut off and overpowered at Wigan Lane, he still made good his way to Worcester, and fought there the last desperate fight for Charles—nor when that day was lost, stern Cromwell's crowning mercy, did he desert his king, but saw him placed in safety, before he thought, too late, of his own preservation.

A skirmish, a prisoner—a court martial, a convicted culprit—a block and a martyr—that was the last of Derby.

She heard, but wept not, nor despaired, but did her duty, mourning in the secrecy of her heart only.

Until not one English flag, save of the commonwealth alone was flying, she held out her island fortalice, and so stern had been her defence, so great was their fear of her desperation, that the Parliament, on the surrender of her strongholds and her submission to their usurping government, permitted her to retain her estates, and enjoy their revenues, and she dwelt there, educating her orphan son, as such a mother only can educate a man; adored by her islanders, respected by Englishmen in general, and unmolested, if unreverenced by the Parliamentarian chiefs, until the restoration of King Charles II. renewed her persecutions, and perhaps brought her nearer to the block than the worst enmity of his enemies.

She escaped all the perils of the Pretended Plot, bore all her sufferings to the last, as she had borne the first; returned to her island home, not the least instance of the ingratitude of kings, lived in perpetual weeds for her lost lords—and died a good wife, a good mother, a good mistress, a good subject—truly a heroine of all time, and conspicuous on the page of history, as the last lady that has levied war, or that shall levy war again forever within the kingdoms of Great Britain.
